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West wising up to Soviet disinformation, expert says

By Roger Fontaine
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Soviet efforts to misinform the media as a tactic in sowing dissension in the West continue to be a serious problem, "but people are starting to listen" to the alarms, according to Sir James Goldsmith, publisher of the French weekly magazine, "L'Express."

In remarks prepared for the Defense Strategy Forum sponsored by the National Strategy Information Center this week, Sir James said that when he began discussing the problem of Soviet disinformation activities, he was regarded as a lunatic. Later, the publisher said, he was treated as an outcast. But today, he said, there is a greater awareness of the problem, known until recently only by a handful of experts.

Disinformation, or "active measures," as the Soviet calls these activities, involves the relaying of false, incomplete or misleading information. The target can be a government, or an elite or mass audience.

Despite Sir James' relative optimism over exposing Soviet and East bloc efforts at manipulating the Western media, the publisher drew a grim picture of continued massive Soviet disinformation activity.

Moscow, he charged, relies heavily on such techniques, which cost between \$3 and \$4 billion a year, because growing Western military strength requires a Soviet strategy of weakening the democracies from within.

Sir James warned that Western failure to understand Soviet strategy was rooted in its inability to comprehend Soviet objectives, which are very different from the West's.

He compared Westerners to the ancient Carthaginians who "were pretty good fighters" but were essentially mercantile people. They never understood the Romans, whose objectives were "military and imperial," he said.

"We seem incapable of understanding Moscow. We are mercantile, they are not," he concluded.

To divide the West, anti-Americanism is encouraged in the European press to alienate European public opinion; it has a

double effect by fostering isolationism in this country when such opinion is replayed here, according to the publisher.

Knowledge of Soviet active measures, according to Sir James, is now quite extensive because of key Soviet bloc defectors, the most prominent being Ladislav Bittman, a Czech intelligence officer who was deputy chief of Prague's Disinformation Department, and Stanislav Levchenko, a KGB intelligence officer assigned to Tokyo who became chief of the Soviet active measures group in Japan.

According to both defectors, whose testimony has been supported by other recent defectors unnamed by Sir James, Soviet efforts are aimed at recruiting journalists across the political spectrum.

They serve two broad purposes. First, they are used to write articles critical of the United States, but not necessarily and openly supportive of Soviet policy. Particular emphasis

is placed on recruiting journalists with a wide following or ones employed by newspapers with large circulations.

Soviet intelligence officers supply guidelines to recruited journalists that contain objectives and themes, but never finished articles.

The second purpose is to employ journalists as collectors of intelligence. The Soviets understand that reporters have access to sensitive information from their own governments, Sir James said.

But, Sir James emphasized, the majority of journalists who get involved do not realize they are part of a Soviet operation. He added that Soviet success is not limited to journalists actually recruited because

the stories they write become part of the newspaper's clip file, which in turn are used later by other reporters for background to their stories. Thus, responsible journalists can be unwitting users of disinformation.

To counteract the Soviet penetration of Western media, Sir James strongly recommended against any government restriction of information. "We need more information, more facts. We need better journalism."

The publisher suggested that Western governments release more reliable information on Soviet active measures. He pointed out that the U.S. government beginning in the Carter administration had done so, but European governments have not.

Sir James also advocated that in Western Europe, those who work for the Soviets be required to register as foreign agents. He further recommended that publishers and editors exercise more control, and be more forthright in identifying the affiliation of contributors to op-ed pages. Sir James cited as an example an article appearing in the London Sunday Times on Nicaragua by an author the paper failed to mention was an associate of renegade CIA agent James Agee.

Sir James also urged that the media itself disclose the sources of their funding. The public should know, he said, who the media represent and where the money is coming from. Invasion of privacy, he said, was odious, but since politicians and government officials must make such disclosures, the media should as well because it cannot be argued they are any less influential.